DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 425 103 SO 029 499

AUTHOR Jacobo, Joe E.
TITLE Arts Education as a Catalyst to Diverse Approaches to Multicultural Education.
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Art; *Art Education; Cultural Activities; Cultural Education; Cultural Pluralism; Educational Change; Fine Arts; *Humanities; *Multicultural Education

ABSTRACT

This paper advocates music and other arts as offering a unique course to both the celebration of cultural diversity and the pursuit for those human, unifying factors that may keep society together. Sections of the paper include an introduction, a historical perspective on the value of the arts and humanity, and a conclusion related to how equity and access for all students can be gained through arts education. Examples are presented of how cutting arts programs from the curriculum as a money-saving strategy can lead to impoverishment of the human spirit. Similar examples are presented of how enhancing the arts curriculum has led to increases of a sense of community and academic achievement in students. (EH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 425 103

Arts Education as a Catalyst to Diverse Approaches to Multicultural Education.

by Joe E. Jacobo

Published: 1997

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joe E. Jacobo

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SO 029 499

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Arts Education as a Catalyst to Diverse Approaches to Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is a priority today for most of the education community. Even schools that are culturally and racially homogeneous have come to understand that all children will have to learn to live and work in a culturally diverse world. There is a concern that must be addressed beyond the current exploration of cultural diversity. It is the need to focus on those cultural behaviors that unify us as human beings (Schmid 1994). It is not good enough to concentrate in our differences and learn from them. However, it is equally important to understand the inner humanistic value of all humans. Music and the other arts offer a unique course to both the celebration of cultural diversity and the pursuit for those human, unifying factors that may keep us together (Schmid 1994).

Music goes directly to the "feelings" level of understanding. Most people can probably recall a class or a teacher that was very weak, and the instructor took all the fun and excitement out of the subjects they were teaching. It could have been any kind of subject: Geography, History, or English, seen as a series of production tables. In contrast, music (taught well) can show how people have dealt with their human existence on this planet from an emotional perspective. At the most important moments of life, music and the arts have always marked the experience (Schmid 1994).

Historical Perspective

One of the most challenging tasks facing the world today is building mutual understanding and respect among ethnic enclaves. When we see many

existing conflicts around the world--between tribes in Nigeria, between Muslims and Hindus in India, and between Serbs, Bosnians, and Croats--which have escalated into brutal wars and horrors of "ethnic cleansing." These conflicts may be the result of long-standing feuds, from the need to assert ethnic identity after generations of repression (Ambach et al. p.11). When we look at the cultural climate in the United States in terms of its ethnically mixed society, we discover something of a miniature model of much of what is happening around the world.

In the last half century time period, the population of the United States was built from a mixture of indigenous groups and people coming primarily from Western Europe, West Africa, Mexico, and Asia. Only since the middle of the twentieth century has this dominance been challenged by other sectors of the population, including African-Americans, Chicanos, and Native-Americans. Other previously ignored sectors of society such as the aged, women, and physically challenged, have joined in the demand for equity. If we are to avoid the kind of social unrest faced by so much of the world today, than we must ensure that our public education system provides learning experiences that will prepare students to live comfortably and productively among those whose world view is different from their own. We must teach the importance of other cultures and other concepts of knowledge (Ambach et al. p.12).

Studies of cultural diversity should be modeled after the processes of intellectual diversity. This approach will reveal the common concerns of all the peoples of the world and basic similarities of all citizens of the United States. By

approaching education in this perspective, our school communities will avoid the dangers of being divided into competitive ethnic compartments (Ambach et al. p.12).

The skill of understanding art as an analysis of culture can begin early in a students's education. For example, the mastery of West African Polyrhythms, the performance of Puerto Rican game songs, and the Fabrication of Hopi Kachina dolls are well within the grasp of elementary school students, who can easily understand both the structure of their works and their functions in society (Ambach el al. p.13). In another analysis, it is possible to trace the complete history of Blacks in the United States through their music, and a comparable study of the arts of other ethnic groups can be equally beneficial.

Equity and Access through Arts Education

The general music program in grades K through 12 is that segment of music education which is responsible for providing the broadest, most pertinent musical literacy for all our citizens. That is why general music should be required for all children in elementary schools (Reimer 1993). Currently in this country we have a hidden crisis that is about to explode to epidemic awareness. This crises is that many school communities have eliminated the general music classes from elementary schools. One example is in a large city in West Texas where the elimination of general music classes has resulted in many students being illiterate of the American music culture and much less of world cultures. The drop-out rates have increased in the areas of continuing band, orchestra, and choir in high schools. Community leaders and administrators fail to see the

importance that general music programs provide for each student. General music programs uniformly and effectively are devoted to producing the kind of comprehensive musical literacy relevant to the multi-musical realities of present-day American culture and what this culture is becoming (Reimer 1993).

One of the most important ways in which to enthuse and encourage children about music is to help them both intellectually and emotionally gain access to and reconnect with the music of this nation and the music of their own cultural groups (Ambach et al. p.14). If general music classes are being eliminated, sooner or later the next step is to eliminate many of the arts programs.

One pivotal example of problems arising related to arts programs was in the summer of 1992, after the Los Angeles disturbances. A youth summit involving some 1,200 of the area's youngsters was assembled. One of the main concerns that was heard very often in the summit was the children describing a slow but consistent reduction of arts in their school programs, until all arts programs in South Central Los Angeles had vanished entirely. One girl described how her music class had been the one place she could regain her identity and find strength. The elimination of the music class eliminated her emotional context for success. Soon afterward, she dropped out of school (Reiner 1993).

Many educators and administrators have heard many similar stories relating to the students only interest and hope of staying in school is in one of the arts programs. The majority of the students are not going to be sports

jocks. In a school of an enrollment of 1,000 students, less than twenty percent are going to be sports students, and even then it is only for a short term event.

Cutting arts programs out of a curriculum is equivalent to shutting off the access to these children's identity. We are facing an urgent crisis! Some schools have begun to turn the tide on falling grades and dropouts by again requiring arts and music pedagogy. One example is one of the poorest schools in the South Bronx in New York, Saint Augustine's, a Catholic school. In 1985, it faced the prospect of closing due to low enrollment. To increase enrollment and student interest levels, the school administration made art and music a central part of the curriculum. Enrollment tripled, and reading and math scores improved by 28 percent (Ambach et al. p.14). The achievement shown by these students is modeled throughout the country, whether they be in remote rural settings or barren urban environments. Wherever music and art are a set part of the curriculum, students are committed in all their class work at higher levels. Even with improvements rising in many parts of the country, there are many school communities who are blinded to great opportunities to improve many areas of education through the arts programs.

We are all very much aware that education reform in the established standards of education has included the arts as an essential part of education. Many educators and administrators have not understood the importance of the arts in Multicultural Education. Focus groups on educational reform agreed that to be prepared for the twenty-first century, students must have the critical-thinking skills and cultural diversity that education in the arts develops, and that

the arts must be incorporated into an integrated curriculum (Ambach et al. p.8).

The message is clear. There is only so much the sciences can tell us about cultural diversity in the United States. While they can measure economic impact and population fads, only the arts can reveal the spirit and soul of a nation committed to social equity (Ambach et al. p.11).

References

Ambach, Gardon M. (Eds.).Butcher, Goodkin, Greene, (1993). Perspectives on Education Reform: Arts Education as Catalyst. Paper. Getty Center for Education in the Arts. Wilshire Bld, Suite 950, Santa Monica, California l6 -1455. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 375068)

Reimer, Bennett (1993, March). Music Education in Our Multimusical Culture. Music Educators Journal, pp. 21-26.

Schmid, Will (1994 April). Music and the Multicultural Mandate: Some important lessons for all students. NASSP Bulletin, pp. 34-38.